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Church archaeology in Glasgow and the kingdom of Strathclyde¹

The Church has provided Glasgow with its greatest architectural legacy, with most of its early history and with its origin myths. If we include Govan, as we must, the material remains there connect us directly with the early medieval kingdom of Strathclyde. The well-known body of sculpture at Govan establishes a tangible link with this dim past and represents our only direct expression of the lords of Strathclyde. Reading these expressions is not straightforward in the absence of contemporary historical material: there are very few written references to Strathclyde in the tenth and eleventh centuries and little is certain about Strathclyde's relationship to either the kingdom of Alba or the Norse of the Irish Sea. Nevertheless it is surprising that more attention has not been given to the relationship between Govan and Glasgow in the centuries surrounding the creation of the diocese of Glasgow. Until recently, archaeologists have had relative little of importance to say about these issues, but happily this has now changed with an increase in archaeological activity in the area, in particular with the excavations conducted during the 1990s at Glasgow Cathedral and at Govan. The studies associated with these programmes of fieldwork invite us to re-evaluate both the early religious development of the Glasgow region and the wider political history of Strathclyde and Alba.

One of the most intriguing points, which serves as a useful starting place for discussion, concerns the elevation of Glasgow in 1114 to the seat of a bishop and the ostensible snubbing of Govan.² Perhaps because there is so little in the contemporary historical record, little serious consideration has been given to the consequences of this

¹This is a revised version of a paper presented in the Religion Session of the Medieval Europe conference held in Brugge in 1997, which I attended through a grant from Historic Scotland. In the course of working on this material I have benefited from discussions with D. Broun, T. O. Clancy, A. M. M. Duncan, J. Durkan, K. Forsyth and A. Macquarrie. They are not responsible for the use I have made of their advice. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Historic Scotland for a grant towards the publication of this article.

²The date-range is for Bishop John's election and subsequent consecration at Rome by Pope Paschal II (d.1118): N. Shead, 'The origins of the medieval diocese of Glasgow', *SHR* 48 (1969) 220-5, at 223. The inquest by David which reestablished Glasgow's possessions is recorded in a document in which Bishop John's sojourn to Jerusalem in 1122 is mentioned (I am grateful to Dr John Durkan for this point.) This presumably is the basis for the statement in A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh 1975), 257, that David carried out the inquest in '1123 or 1124'. Shead, 'The origins of the medieval diocese of Glasgow', 223, however, observes that 'the actual enquiry recorded in this document could have taken place somewhat earlier and might even be contemporary with Michael...that is between 1109 and 1114' (on Bishop Michael see next note).

act and no discussion has taken place about its political significance with respect to the kingdom of Strathclyde. And yet this relatively minor geographical shift of a mere three miles would appear to be a defining moment both in the creation of the medieval burgh of Glasgow and in the demise of Strathclyde as a kingdom.

The following discussion is organised into three sections. The first concerns the church of Govan, which in the eleventh century was at the height of its prestige and flourishing under the gaze of the royal estate just across the Clyde at Partick. The next section examines the archaeological evidence for the development of the cathedral as a means of measuring how the religious and political centres of gravity swung irreversibly to Glasgow during the twelfth century. The third considers the cultural transformations embodied in the act of founding the diocese.

The most obvious aspect of these changes was the construction of an ecclesiastical structure which was a component of the kingdom of the Scots intended to modernise and regularise the administration of the Church, and which provided a means of asserting authority over a formerly autonomous, not to say disputed, territory. The less clear-cut transformation relates to the government of Strathclyde and involved a shift away from a traditionally hallowed centre with its carefully crafted monumental backdrop and the replacement of the great secular lord with a bishop in a new setting.

Until recently discussions of Glasgow's early history have 'been largely confined to examinations of the textual evidence relating to the foundation of the diocese in the early twelfth century,³ while the significance and status of Govan remained predominately a topic of archaeological discussion.⁴ Happily an upturn of interest in the early medieval history of Strathclyde means this is no longer the case. The increase in archaeological attention was signalled by Leslie Alcock's work at Dumbarton Rock,⁵ while Alfred Smyth's extended examination

³Shead, 'The origins of the medieval diocese of Glasgow'. He explains that the two bishops 'of Glasgow' consecrated by the archbishop of York in the 1050s were probably suffragan bishops within his huge diocese, and that Bishop Michael (1109x?14) should be regarded 'as the forerunner of the bishops of Carlisle rather than the first of a new line of bishops of Glasgow' (*ibid.*, 225). Shead argues (at 223) that 'the earliest reference to the church of Glasgow would be 1109-14'. G. W. S. Barrow, *King David I and the Church of Glasgow* (Glasgow 1996) provides the most detailed discussion of the foundation of Glasgow but says little about Govan.

⁴C. A. R. Radford examined most the sculptural in Strathclyde as a means of charting the growth of Christianity in Strathclyde and was less interested in the larger historical picture: 'The early cross and shrine of St Mahew, Cardross, Dunbartonshire', *IR* 17 (1966) 3-10; 'The early Christian monuments at Govan and Inchinnan', *Trans Glasgow Archaeological Society* 15 pt 4 (1967) 173-88; 'The early Church in Strathclyde and Galloway', *Medieval Archaeology* 11 (1967) 105-26.

⁵Leslie Alcock and Elizabeth A. Alcock, 'Reconnaissance excavations on early historic fortifications and other royal sites in Scotland, 1974-84: 4, excavations at Alt Clut, Clyde Rock, Strathclyde 1974-75', *PSAS* 120 (1990) 95-149.

of the kingdom of Strathclyde in his survey of early medieval Scotland seems to mark a similar rekindling of interest among historians.⁶ The most noteworthy individual effort has been by Alan Macquarrie, who has re-evaluated much of the source materials for Strathclyde,⁷ while the outstanding collaborative achievement has been the reconsideration of the Govan sculpture by leading archaeologists and historians.⁸

The sculpture must be the starting place of any consideration of Govan as it constitutes the firmest evidence. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Govan Old parish church was known to possess an outstanding collection of early medieval sculpture,⁹ sculpture which was recognised to pre-date the foundation of Glasgow cathedral. The awareness of Govan's antiquity is nowhere more clearly stated than in the inscription on the plinth designed by Rowand Anderson in 1908 to support the monolithic sarcophagus. It identifies the sarcophagus with a St Constantine who flourished in sixth-century south-western Britain.¹⁰ Despite this early display of civic promotion, it is not widely appreciated that Govan possesses the largest collection of early medieval monuments outside of Iona and St Andrews, possibly the largest in Scotland of the ninth to the eleventh centuries. Equally, it is sometimes forgotten that across the river, at Glasgow proper, the earliest surviving fragments of sculpted and painted masonry from the cathedral were recognised as being from the twelfth century and later.¹¹ Thus for some time it has been acknowledged that the surviving material remains have raised the possibility that Govan was the most important religious centre on the Clyde during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

⁶Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men Scotland AD 80-1000* (London 1984); see also W. D. H. Sellar, 'Warlords, holy men and matrilineal succession', *IR* 36 (1985) 29-43.

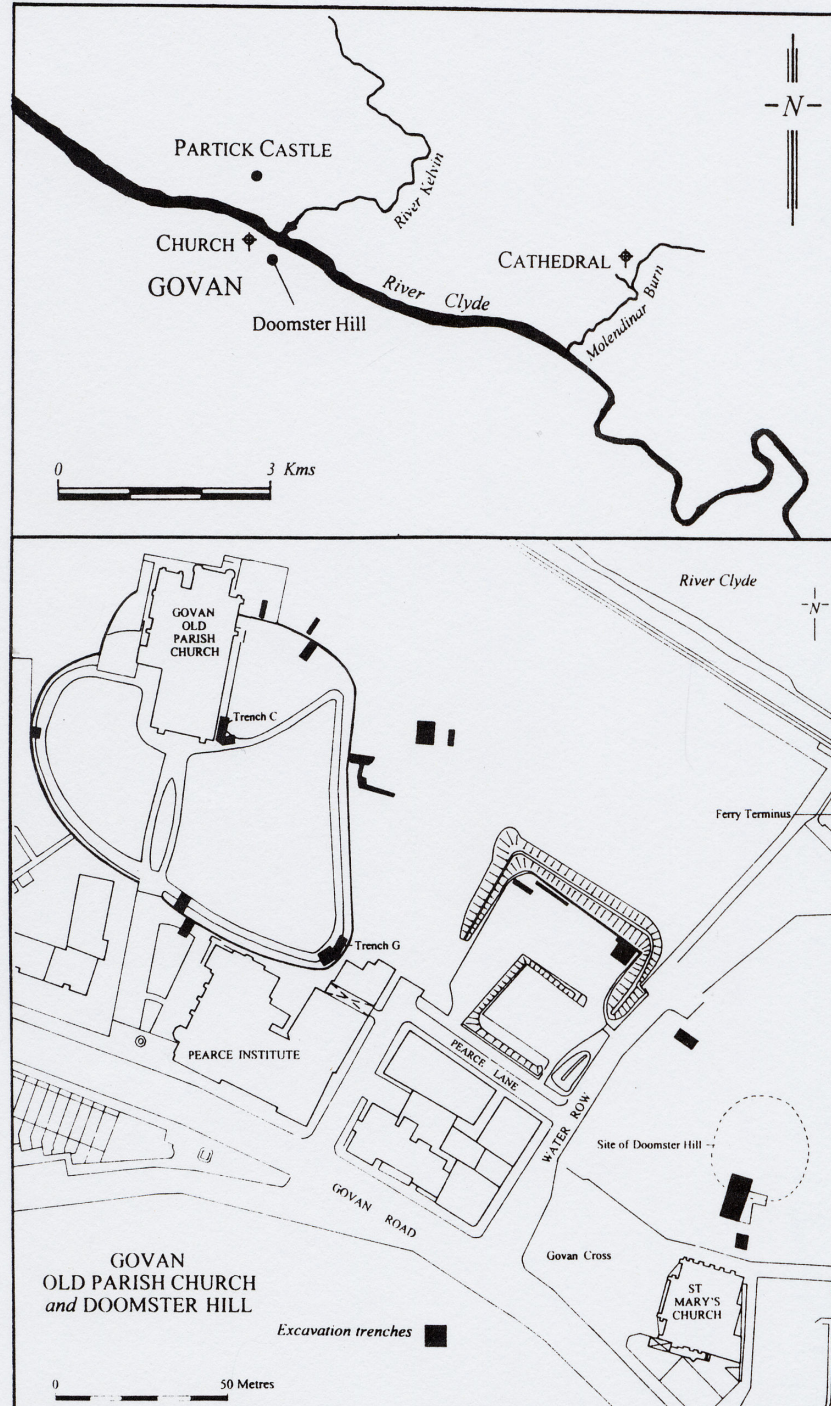
⁷A. Macquarrie, 'Early Christian Govan: its historical context', *RSCHS* 34 (1990) 1-17; 'The career of Saint Kentigern of Glasgow: *vita*, *lectiones* and glimpses of fact', *IR* 37 (1986) 3-24; 'The kings of Strathclyde, c. 400-1018', in *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community. Essays Presented to G.W.S. Barrow*, edd. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (Edinburgh 1993), 1-19.

⁸*Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture*, ed. Anna Ritchie (Stroud 1994) [hereafter Ritchie, *Govan*].

⁹T. Davidson Kelly, 'The Govan collection in the context of local history', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 1-18, effectively describes the increasing awareness of the importance of the sculpture during the later nineteenth century.

¹⁰This is certainly the grandest piece of furniture made for an early Christian monument in Scotland; see Ritchie, *Govan*, 13, and fig. 11. Macquarrie has pointed out that there are Constantinian candidates for the dedication besides the one said in the inscription to have died in 576 (*ibid.*, 31-2).

¹¹C. A. R. Radford and E. L. G. Stones, 'The remains of the cathedral of Bishop Jocelin at Glasgow (c.1197)', *The Antiquaries Journal* 44 (1964) 220-32. This is still the case: the 1992-3 excavations did not produce any sculpture earlier than the twelfth century (see below).



Plan of churchyard of Govan Old showing locations of excavations of 1994-6.

Govan Old parish church occupies a curvilinear churchyard adjacent to the Clyde opposite the confluence with its tributary, the River Kelvin. An important ford (later a ferry crossing) was located two hundred metres to the east of the church and it was around this crossing place that the medieval settlement developed.¹² The past 100 years have been particularly rough on the archaeological fabric of Govan; the shipyards which engulfed the Govan riverbank ruthlessly cleared the standing traces of early Govan, apart from the churchyard itself. The raised, ovoid churchyard has long attracted the attention of antiquarians, because curvilinear enclosures are recognised as good indicators of ancient church sites¹³ and because it contained such a large quantity of early medieval sculpture. The extant collection comprises four monumental crosses, the unique monolithic sarcophagus and twenty-six grave-markers of varying age and style, including five 'hogback' gravestones and twenty-one recumbent slabs decorated with interlace crosses. A further sixteen recumbent slabs have been lost over the past century. If sculpture is an appropriate measure of the patronage and wealth of early medieval churches, then Govan is clearly one of the best-endowed churches of the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, this collection of sculpted stones is exceptional not simply for its quantity, but for its composition and in particular for its emphasis on burial monuments.

There are no contemporary inscriptions on the Govan sculpture, so they can be dated only by art-historical means.¹⁴ The earliest elements of the Govan collection are the hogback grave-stones, which can be dated to the mid-tenth century. Hogback grave-stones are a type of monument which is unique to the areas of Norse settlement in Britain. The ornament of the Govan hogbacks shows affinities with those hogbacks from Cumbria, although the Govan stones are much larger.¹⁵ The form and decoration of the latter provide unambiguous evidence of the close relationship with those regions of Cumbria which came to be dominated by the Norse in the tenth century.¹⁶

Thirty-six recumbent grave-stones are known and are well enough documented to show that they were not 'mass-produced' monuments. Each stone is unique; the interlace cross-patterns executed

¹²Thomas C. F. Brothie, *The History of Govan* (Govan 1938). Brothie covers well the nineteenth-century transition from a rural village to an industrial powerhouse.

¹³Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (Glasgow 1971).

¹⁴The majority of the studies in Ritchie, *Govan*, are concerned with the dating and artistic affinities of the collection and they expose a major limitation of the sculpture: on the basis of current knowledge none of the material can be dated more precisely than to within half a century.

¹⁵James Lang, 'The Govan hogbacks: a reappraisal', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 123-32.

¹⁶Richard N. Bailey, 'Govan and Irish Sea sculpture', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 113-22, and 'Aspects of Viking age sculpture in Cumbria', in *The Scandinavians in Cumbria*, edd. John R. Baldwin and Ian D. Whyte (Edinburgh 1985), 53-64.

on the rectangular and trapezoidal slabs have been individually designed. On the basis of the forms of the crosses and styles of interlace, the series appears to extend from the tenth through the eleventh centuries.¹⁷ Some of the interlace decoration exhibits distinctive Anglo-Scandinavian features. The number of recumbent grave-stones are indicative of a long tradition of monumental burial in the sanctuary of St Constantine. Full-length decorated recumbent grave-stones are a feature of tenth- and eleventh-century cemeteries; however, apart from Govan, no place in Scotland has more than a handful. The well-preserved crosses and sarcophagus (discussed below) exhibit powerful secular imagery in the form of mounted warriors and the hunt which are evidence of secular patronage. This influence raises the possibility that these ornamented grave slabs were those of secular patrons rather than clerical memorials.¹⁸

Govan is also well-endowed with free-standing crosses. It is the only site in the kingdom of Strathclyde with more than a single early-medieval cross. Only one of Govan's four monumental crosses, the 'Sun Stone', has survived intact, doubtless because it is shaped from a sturdy block. Of the others only the shafts remain, which has led to their being somewhat under-appreciated. The Sun Stone appears to be the earliest of the crosses. It may have begun life as a prehistoric standing-stone, before being roughly shaped and adorned with a mounted warrior, an interlaced cross and snake-boss. The other crosses appear to have been much more ambitious sculptures of large free-standing crosses. Like the recumbent slabs, they appear to date to the tenth or eleventh century.¹⁹ Such a large number of upright monumental crosses is again outstanding and one needs to go to important religious sites such as St Andrews or Clonmacnoise to find as many major sculptures at this date.

The most striking sculpture at Govan is the monolithic sarcophagus decorated with interlace panels, a mounted warrior/hunter and stags. The all-over decorative treatment suggests that this sarcophagus was designed for prominent public display and was intended to serve as a reliquary rather than as a tomb.²⁰ In the British Isles such monolithic monuments are extremely rare; it is unique in

¹⁷Rosemary Cramp, 'The Govan recumbent cross-slabs', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 55-62, does not make sufficiently clear that these 'cross-slabs' are grave covers; also (at 58) she seems to suggest that the earliest slabs might date to the late ninth century, but dates the bulk to the succeeding centuries.

¹⁸The large numbers of undecorated recumbent slabs at St Blane's, Bute, suggest that the grave markers of ecclesiastics may have commonly been plain slabs.

¹⁹Ian Fisher, 'The Govan cross-shafts and cross-slabs', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 47-54.

²⁰Charles Thomas, 'Christianity at Govan: but when?', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 19-26, has placed the sarcophagus within the tradition of early medieval enshrinement of relics but after the development of post-and-panel shrines, as at St Ninian's Isle or Jedburgh.

Scotland and only one Anglo-Saxon example is known.²¹ Probably the most apt comparison is with the carved stone panels known as the St Andrews Sarcophagus, which was designed in the eighth century to display venerated remains in a spectacular fashion.²²

This exceptional collection requires an exceptional explanation. The high level of decoration on the grave-slabs can be reasonably interpreted as indicating that these were memorials to members of the Strathclyde nobility, whether they were elite clerics or secular lords. Moreover, an implicit link can be made between the grave-stones and the relics of St Constantine presumably housed in the sarcophagus, which suggests that Govan was the centre of a cult patronised by the royal dynasty. Together with its large enclosure and monumental crosses the burial monuments suggest that Govan was the principal church of the kingdom of Strathclyde during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Today Govan's major surviving medieval topographical feature is the churchyard itself, which is enclosed in a curving wall that until the twentieth century stood 2 meters proud of the surrounding ground level. The churchyard was one social focus in early medieval Govan, but there was a second topographical feature which provided another focus. Adjacent to the crossing place of the river, 150 m. from the churchyard there stood a massive, artificial mound (45 m. diameter by 5 m. high), known as the Doomster Hill.²³ Roy's map²⁴ shows the great mound as being much larger than the churchyard, which has (unaccountably) been shown as rectangular. The hill was levelled in the late nineteenth century, but enough key details survive which indicate its nature. The most detailed drawing of it to survive shows that the hill had a flat top (*ca* 30 m. in diameter) and a distinct stepped profile. A vague account of the insertion of a water tank into the mound in the mid-nineteenth century reported that human bones and fragments of timber were encountered near the centre of the mound. Although there is no evidence to allow us to estimate the age of this apparent burial, it should be recognised that such an earth and timber tomb would be unprecedented in Scotland and would be rare in a Scandinavian context.

²¹R. M. Sprearman, 'The Govan Sarcophagus: an enigmatic monument', in Ritchie, *Govan*, 38.

²²Isabel Henderson, 'Primus inter pares: the St Andrews sarcophagus and Pictish sculpture', *The St Andrews Sarcophagus: a Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections*, ed. Sally M. Foster (Dublin 1998), 97-167: at 155 she suggests that 'the obvious candidate as patron is the expansionist Oengus son of Fergus, who died in 761', and (at 156) that 'the Sarcophagus ought to contain the remains of a saintly king', suggesting Nechtan son of Derile (d.729) as a possibility.

²³T. A. Davidson Kelly conveniently summarised the antiquarian evidence for the Doomster and reproduces the key illustrations in Ritchie, *Govan*, 1-18.

²⁴Reproduced in Ritchie, *Govan*, figure 4.

Leaving aside the uncertain burial, the name and form of the monument make a strong case for regarding the mound as a court hill with Norse associations. The name of the hill refers to the legal officer, the Dempster or Doomster, who pronounced sentence and whose origin is firmly within Celtic law.²⁵ Open-air court sites were a conspicuous feature of early medieval Scotland,²⁶ and frequently were located on or near prehistoric ritual monuments.²⁷ Recent work on the etymology of the place-name of Govan supports the notion that the Doomster Hill was a major component of the Govan complex. Thomas Clancy has suggested that it derives from the Brittonic *gwo-/go-*, 'small, little', and *ban*, 'crest, hill',²⁸ apparently inspired by the major distinguishing features of the place.

The stepped form of the Doomster Hill invites specific comment, since this seems to mark it out from other Scottish court hills. The most well-known stepped mound is the Tynwald on the Isle of Man, where the lord of Man was inaugurated and the Manx court or parliament met.²⁹ Much smaller than the Doomster Hill, the Tynwald mound stands only 3 m. high and is about 25 m. in diameter. It would seem that it has always had steps, but following its nineteenth-century restoration it now has four terraces. There are other mounds with rather simpler profiles and Norse associations which are nearer to hand. These include the 'motte' at Tinwald, Dumfriesshire,³⁰ and the stepped mound at Fellfoot, Little Langdale, Cumbria.³¹ Perhaps, however, the most apt comparison is with the *Thingmote* in Dublin, which Elizabeth FitzPatrick has recognised as a royal inauguration and meeting place in the twelfth century and as a place of public assembly 'until the seventeenth century'.³² A survey of Dublin in 1682 shows the *Thingmote* as a substantial mound with a distinctly stepped profile and,

²⁵W. D. H. Sellar, 'Celtic law and Scots law: survival and integration', *Scottish Studies* 29 (1989) 1-27; G. W. S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London 1973); chapter on the *judex*.

²⁶G. W. S. Barrow, 'Popular courts in early medieval Scotland: some suggested place-name evidence', *Scottish Studies* 21 (1981) 1-24.

²⁷S. T. Driscoll, 'Picts and prehistory: cultural resource management in early medieval Scotland', *World Archaeology* 30 (1998) 142-58.

²⁸Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Govan: the name', *Friends of Govan Old Annual Report*, 6 (1996) 2-3, dismissing Macquarrie's preferred Gaelic etymology (Ritchie, *Govan*, 27) of 'little beak' (referring to a promontory in the Clyde) as being linguistically impossible. Clancy's interpretation withstands Macquarrie's rejoinder in *Friends of Govan Old Annual Report* 7 (1997).

²⁹W. Cubbon and B. R. S. Megaw, 'The Western Isles and the growth of the Manx Parliament', *The Journal of the Manx Museum* 5 no. 66 (1942) 57-62; Anon., 'The Vikings in Man: a great Norse scholar's view', *The Journal of the Manx Museum* 3 (1935-7) 23.

³⁰The RCAHMS *Eastern Dumfriesshire an Archaeological Landscape* (Edinburgh 1997), 187-8, aerial photograph suggests the presence of a step surviving in the ploughed slopes of this mound.

³¹N. Higham, 'The Scandinavians in North Cumbria: raids and settlement in the later ninth to mid tenth centuries', *The Scandinavians in Cumbria*, edd. Baldwin and Whyte, 36, plate IV.

³²Elizabeth FitzPatrick, 'The Practice and Siting of Royal Inauguration in Medieval Ireland', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 2 vols (Trinity College, Dublin, 1997) i, 76.

if the drawing is to scale, about 8 m. high and 15 m. in diameter.³³ There are two conclusions to be drawn from these comparisons. First, the form of the Doomster Hill suggest links with other court hills in the Norse Irish Sea world; second, that major mounds such as the Tynwald and the *Thingmote* have associations with sovereignty. This last point is one to which we will return.

In an effort to evaluate the archaeological potential of Govan and to explore some of the problems raised by the material discussed above, a series of exploratory excavations were undertaken between 1994 and 1996 by the Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD).³⁴ Eighteen trenches were opened up in and around the churchyard and in the area of the Doomster Hill to assess the survival of archaeological remains in Govan. Although necessarily limited in scale and duration a number of significant discoveries were made. Perhaps the most important was that substantial archaeological deposits survive in a number of places, showing that previous pessimism about such survivals in Govan is unfounded. Even in their partially investigated state the structural remains discovered have increased our confidence in the archaeological integrity of the churchyard site and have revealed a roadway connecting the churchyard and the Doomster Hill. The locations of the excavation efforts can be grouped into three general broad zones: the perimeter of the churchyard (inside and out); the site of the church; and the Doomster Hill.

The churchyard is not oval or round, rather it is pear-shaped, coming to a point in the south-east. This shape has long bothered archaeologists who questioned the antiquity or integrity of the eastern boundary. Trenches located on the south and east sides of the churchyard have revealed the presence of a massive ditch (up to 4 m. wide and 2 m. deep) running just outside the existing boundary wall. This established the antiquity of the existing enclosure, although close dating evidence was not recovered. The modern churchyard wall occupies the position of the upcast bank which would have formed an ecclesiastical *vallum*. Trenches on the north side could not confirm the presence of a ditch, but modern disturbance here was extensive, and in any case the riverside of the ecclesiastic precinct may not have been marked by a ditch. At two places within the boundary traces of hearths

³³*Ibid.*, fig. 13 (between pp. 76-7).

³⁴These excavations were sponsored by the City of Glasgow Planning Department, the Glasgow Development Agency, and Glasgow University, and enjoyed the material support of Rev. Davidson Kelly and the Govan Old congregation. There are interim reports on all three excavations: I. Cullen and S. T. Driscoll, *Excavations at Govan Old Parish Church 1994*, GUARD Report 175.1 (Glasgow 1995); S. T. Driscoll and R. S. Will, *Water Row, Govan*, GUARD Report 175.2 (Glasgow 1996); S. T. Driscoll and R. S. Will, *Govan Old Parish Church and Water Row*, GUARD Report 175.3 (Glasgow 1997).

and evidence of light industrial activity were found, including the working of shale. At the south-east 'point', the excavation revealed a metalled road surface which seems to mark the position of the original entrance, because it was recognised that the metalled road was aligned on a small lane, Pearse Lane (formerly Manse Lane) leading directly towards the site of the Doomster Hill.

The existing structure, Rowand Anderson's nineteenth-century Gothic revival church, is several buildings removed from any medieval church building. Fortunately the influence of nineteenth-century Presbyterian liturgical practice led to the adoption of a north-south orientation,³⁵ which left the position of the earlier church standing clear immediately to the east of the existing building. In this location massive dry-stone foundations were discovered some 2 m. below the modern ground surface. These footings seem to represent the south-west corner of a building on an alignment shifted 90 degrees from that of the existing church. Too little of this wall has yet been revealed to allow us to observe anything beyond noting that they appear to be the foundations for a timber-built church. There was no close dating evidence for these foundations, but there were no traces of mortar with this structure and since churches built of mortar and dressed stone become common in Scotland only after the twelfth century, it seems reasonable to propose that this building was built earlier. How much earlier will have to await the results of radiocarbon dating from two oriented burials discovered below these foundations. If nothing else these burials indicate that the foundations are those of a church.

Archaeological access to the site of the Doomster Hill was much more problematic. Not only has over 2 m. of modern rubble accumulated above the early nineteenth-century ground level, but the exact location of the mound was uncertain. The construction ditch of the Doomster Hill was, however, so massive that it was eventually located. Unfortunately, despite two separate attempts, it was not possible to excavate a complete section through the ditch because of its great size, but the scale of the ditch (at least 8 m. wide and over 2 m. deep) is in line with the reported size of the mound. It also proved impossible to trace the line of the ditch or to investigate the site of the mound itself; a slight rise in the ground level near the ditch, however, may be the remnants of the mound, suggesting that its base may yet survive. All dating evidence from the ditch related to later medieval silting up and infilling; no evidence for a construction date was recovered.

³⁵Alternatively the orientation of the modern church was dictated by the position of graves. I am grateful to Rev. T. Davidson Kelly for pointing this out to me.

These discoveries coupled with the previously known material draw attention to the integration between the church, with its saintly cult and high-status burial ground, and the open-air court site of the Doomster Hill. They also encourage us to consider the wider setting of Govan, as represented by its pre-modern parish. Govan was exceptionally large for a lowland parish. The pre-Reformation parish occupied an area about 10 km. by 6 km. spanning both sides of the Clyde, a swathe of fine agricultural land which included the Strathclyde royal estate of Partick. Partick was eventually granted to the bishops of Glasgow, but in the early twelfth century was royal and was identified in Jocelin's *Life of Kentigern* as a royal residence of King Rhydderch, a seventh-century ruler of Strathclyde.³⁶

What this body of evidence indicates is that Govan served as a major, if not *the* major, ceremonial and administrative centre for the kings of Strathclyde between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Other interpretations are possible. In a discussion of early religious houses in Scotland, Macquarrie approached Govan in purely ecclesiastical terms, arguing that the growth and development of Govan, like that of Dunkeld, should be seen as a 'visible ecclesiastical manifestation of political dominance' of the dynasty of Cinaed mac Ailpín.³⁷ This analysis of Govan is part of a more general argument which holds that Brittonic Strathclyde was culturally, as well as politically, subordinate to Gaelic Alba throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries. Such a position is at odds with the view presented here which reads the Govan monuments as the apparatus of early medieval government and as a sign of British sovereignty. This debate is at the heart of any consideration of the position of Strathclyde and we will return to it.

Leaving the status of Govan for a moment to return to the designation of Glasgow as the seat of the bishop, we should first recognise that in selecting Glasgow David I was acknowledging that at the turn of the twelfth century in Strathclyde the centre of gravity was on the middle Clyde around the Clyde-Kelvin junction, rather than downstream at Dumbarton. Arguably the decisive factors in Glasgow's favour were its tradition of ancient sanctity and the superior qualities of St Kentigern. As far as contemporary documentation goes the history of Glasgow formally begins with the creation of the diocese in 1114x18 by David I shortly after he became ruler of Cumbria and before he

³⁶Macquarrie, 'The career of St Kentigern', 18; Macquarrie, *The Saints of Scotland: Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450-1093* (Edinburgh 1997), 137. This is almost certainly not a contemporary account.

³⁷Alan Macquarrie, 'Early Christian religious houses in Scotland: foundation and function', *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, edd. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester 1992), 110-36, at 126; see also *idem*, 'Early Christian Govan: the historical context', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 44 part 1 (1990) 1-17.

became king.³⁸ Glasgow, of course, claimed to be a continuation of the ancient diocese of St Kentigern, who was said to have established a bishopric at Glasgow prior to his death *ca* 614. Unfortunately the names of any possible successors of Kentigern as bishop are unknown until 1055x60, and there is no firm evidence that Glasgow was their seat.³⁹ If there had been an early diocese based at Glasgow one might have expected traditions of earlier incumbents to have survived and to have been incorporated into the cathedral archives, as happened at St Andrews. Unless of course the bishops of Strathclyde were based elsewhere, perhaps at Govan.

The Kentigern tradition is not the most robust of historical authorities. It rests principally on two *vitae* produced in the late twelfth century which appear to have drawn upon earlier material. In his critical survey of the Kentigern tradition, Macquarrie has proposed a text-history in which the 'core' of a Life (F) current in the twelfth century consisted of material composed *ca* 685x725.⁴⁰ Unfortunately this dating horizon is not very firm; it is based entirely upon secondary arguments which derive from Macquarrie's interpretation of Bede's response to the battle of Dunnichen and of the cultural context of the Ruthwell Cross.⁴¹ While we should probably allow that Kentigern was active in the late sixth and early seventh century in the Strathclyde kingdom of Rhydderch Hael, there is no independent evidence for the nature of his diocese or his origins in Fife and East Lothian. As a consequence there is as yet no consensus about the importance of Kentigern's church at Glasgow, of its longevity, or indeed whether it was indeed the seat of a bishop for the five centuries following his death.

Regardless of this uncertainty, there can be little doubt that Kentigern was more popular a saint than Constantine. Dedications to St Kentigern are found throughout the medieval diocese and beyond: a particularly significant group runs south to include Lanark and Hoddum, through Cumbria all the way to North Wales.⁴² In his Life,

³⁸For one earlier reference to Glasgow, datable probably to 1109x14, see n.3, above.

³⁹Macquarrie, 'Early Christian religious houses', 126-7. See also n.3, above.

⁴⁰Macquarrie, 'The career of Saint Kentigern', 12-13, 18-22 (where 730 was preferred as an approximate date-limit); revised in *idem*, *The Saints of Scotland*, 130-1, 138-9.

⁴¹See also John MacQueen, 'Yvain, Ewen, and Owein ap Urien', *TDGNHAS* 33 (1956), 107-31, and J. Carney, *Studies in Early Irish Literature* (Dublin 1955), for earlier arguments for a seventh- or eighth-century Life of Kentigern. These are criticised in Kenneth Jackson, 'Sources for the life of Kentigern', *Studies in the Early British Church*, ed. Nora Chadwick (Cambridge 1958), 273-357, who concludes (at 356) 'that nothing remotely like the *Life of Kentigern* in the form we see it in Jocelyn existed so early as the seventh century'; Jackson represented the earliest strata of Kentigern material as not necessarily older than the eleventh century (see stemma at 342).

⁴²Morag Redford, 'Commemoration of Saints in the Celtic Church of Scotland', unpublished M.Litt. dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 1988), 171, 220-21, identifies twice as many Kentigern dedications.

Kentigern inhabits a land which corresponds to the kingdom of Strathclyde (including Cumbria), the intended extent of the diocese of Glasgow. All of these dedications cannot, however, be the work of twelfth-century propagandists; the Kentigern dedications along the south shore of the Solway can be dated to the early tenth century and Hoddum was clearly a significant church from the eighth century.⁴³ Although Kentigern's popularity was firmly western, tradition accorded him an eastern pedigree which included Lothian royal kin and a Fife upbringing, which may account for the dedications around Auchterarder. One can appreciate how a saint with eastern origins and a strong western following would have appealed to David I as he sought to extend the authority of the Scots westward from their power base in the east. By comparison, there is far less evidence of interest in St Constantine's cult. Apart from Govan the two other main dedications are in Kintyre, the alleged site of his martyrdom, and at Crawford, the southern limit of Clydesdale.

Given the problems about the historicity of Kentigern, the uncertainty of the status of Glasgow prior to the twelfth century and our ignorance about the earliest stages of the development of the cathedral, there was no shortage of targets for the excavations at Glasgow Cathedral.⁴⁴ The requirements of the improvement programme allowed for large scale excavations in the nave and the crypt, but did not give free reign to examine other parts of the cathedral. As expected, substantial *in situ* remains of the twelfth-century cathedrals were encountered. But also, as expected, the evidence for pre-twelfth-century activity was sparse. There was no trace of a pre-twelfth-century church or structure associated with the enshrined burial place of Kentigern in the crypt; the site, however, was not without trace of Christian activity. Evidence of an early cemetery was recovered.

Among the earliest features on the site were two burials oriented east-west, which lay below portions of the twelfth-century cathedrals. The earliest has yielded a radiocarbon date of cal AD 677-860 (GU-4747), which points to a cemetery near to the traditional location of Kentigern's burial-place within a few generations of his death. The other early grave is likely to represent the final phase of burial prior to

⁴³Higham, 'The Scandinavians in North Cumbria', 41, C. E. Lowe, 'New light on the Anglian "minster" of Hoddum: recent excavations at Hallguards quarry, Hoddum, Annandale and Eskdale District, Dumfries and Galloway Region', *TDGNHAS* 66 (1991) 11-35.

⁴⁴The 1992-3 excavations were sponsored by Historic Scotland as part of a comprehensive programme of improvements to the cathedral services. They have been reported on in S. T. Driscoll, 'Excavations at Glasgow Cathedral: a preliminary report on the discoveries made in 1992-93', *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* 17 (1991-92), 63-76, and are discussed further in S. T. Driscoll, 'Highlights of the excavations at Glasgow Cathedral 1992-3', *Proceedings of the British Archaeological Association Conference in Glasgow*, ed. Richard Fawcett (in press). A monograph length report is in preparation.

the foundation of the diocese. Rather predictably the excavations adjacent to the existing shrine over Kentigern's burial-place yielded no evidence of any early features or architectural structure. This is not too surprising given the scale of the later building works which would have swept away earlier traces. Perhaps more significant than the absence of evidence for an early church is the lack of sculpture contemporary with the Govan sculpture.⁴⁵ The excavations were limited and a small church, which would be expected alongside the cemetery and the holy well (later incorporated into the thirteenth-century cathedral fabric) could easily have been missed. The complete absence of sculpture is harder to explain away. The other early Scottish cathedrals—St Andrews, Brechin, Dunblane, Dunkeld, Aberdeen and Elgin—have all produced early Christian sculpture of some description from in and around their precincts.

Whatever the nature of Glasgow prior to 1114x18, after it was selected as the seat of the bishop the site was under development almost continuously during the twelfth century. Three main phases of building are known historically and have been identified architecturally and archaeologically.⁴⁶ The least well known was the first cathedral which was consecrated in 1136. The excavations revealed the foundations of the west front of this cathedral in the third bay of the nave to the west of the crossing. The foundations provide little indication of the form of this church, other than suggesting that it was perhaps of the order of 35 m. long (if it included the burial-place of the saint). Column drums found reused in the fabric of the second cathedral suggest that it was a building of some complexity, perhaps with aisles or a crypt.

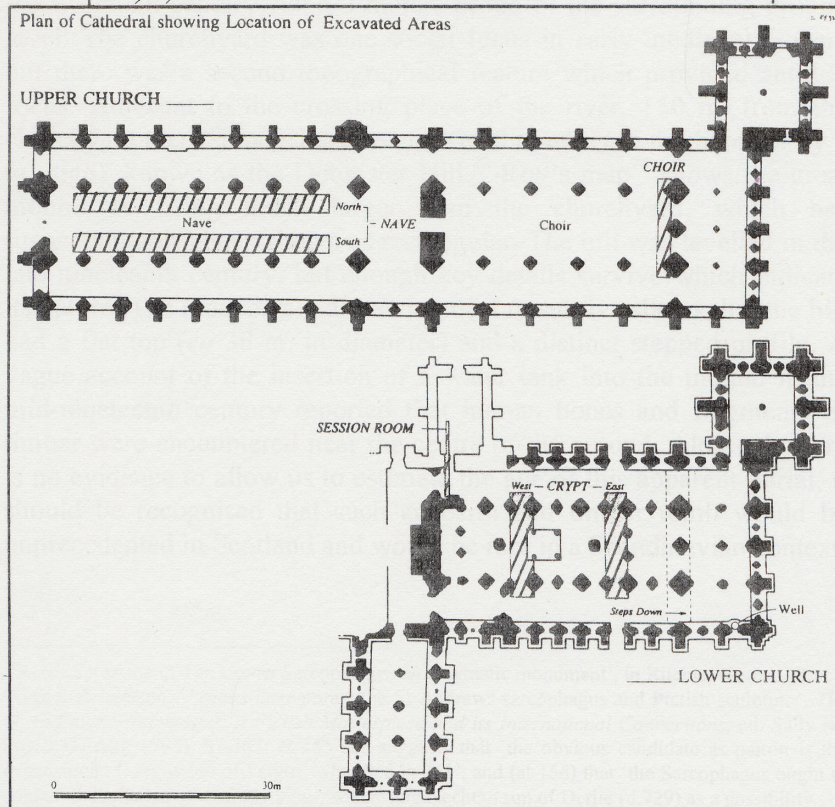
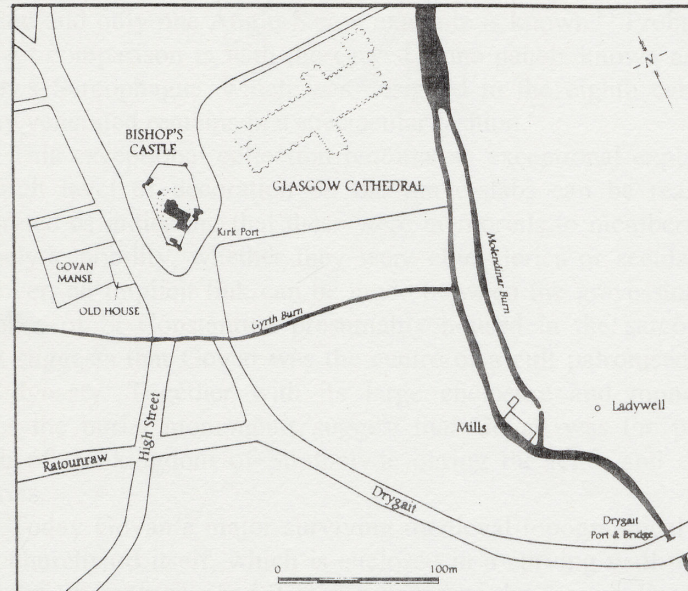
Plates Two human representations from Govan and Glasgow convey differences in audience, cultural setting and artistic intention.

Opposite. The most prominent figure on the Govan sarcophagus is a mounted warrior represented in a manner which is firmly within the northern tradition of early medieval sculpture (photo courtesy of T. E. Gray).

Over. A fragment of a late-twelfth-century wall painting from the Glasgow excavations shows part of a face delicately rendered by a painter with a complete command of the conventions of Romanesque painting. The only 'local' feature is the apparent saltire (photo courtesy of Historic Scotland. Crown copyright).

⁴⁵Jocelin of Furness, however, mentions the existence of an old cross at Glasgow: *The Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern*, ed. and trans. A. P. Forbes, *Historians of Scotland* vol.v (Edinburgh 1874), 110.

⁴⁶Richard Fawcett, 'Glasgow Cathedral', *The Buildings of Scotland: Glasgow*, edd. E. Williamson *et al.* (London 1990), 108-53.



Plan of Glasgow Cathedral showing the location of the excavations of 1992-3.

In introducing the possibility of an early crypt we are anticipating the crypt of the second cathedral and the distinguished one in the existing third cathedral. The small surviving fragment of the second cathedral embedded in the south-west corner of the existing fabric clearly comes from a crypt of some sophistication, probably cruciform in plan and embracing the site of Kentigern's tomb. From the rubble fragments recovered during the excavation, it is clear that the second cathedral was one of the most ambitious churches in twelfth-century Scotland. Overall this church may have been designed to be about 50 m. in length, but, although it was consecrated in 1197, the west front was never completed. The carved architectural fragments are of a high quality and the interior was decorated with substantial wall-paintings. Wall-painting from the twelfth century in Scotland rarely survives; we are fortunate to have recovered over two dozen fragments of painted masonry. From these fragments it can be seen that paint was used both to accentuate key architectural features and to compose figurative murals, one of which may have formed part of the backdrop to the shrine to Kentigern. This material is confidently dated to the late twelfth century and it now seems that the much discussed painted voussoir was part of the same decorative programme.⁴⁷ The building of this second cathedral was undertaken during the episcopate of Bishop Jocelin who was also responsible for commissioning the Life of Kentigern by Jocelin of Furness and for obtaining episcopal rights over the burgh of Glasgow.⁴⁸ It is probably a sign of Bishop Jocelin's success in these ventures that a third, even larger, cathedral was begun before the second one could be completed. This final building campaign started around 1200 and was to continue for most of the thirteenth century.

The development of Glasgow cathedral was not simply the material expression of the increasingly popular cult of Kentigern, but also a celebration of the increasing power of the bishops, who established themselves over the twelfth century as the most important lords within Strathclyde. During the course of their first century the bishops of Glasgow appear to have acquired a number of estates formerly held by the kings of Strathclyde, most famously Partick, as well as securing the rights to the burgh market from the crown. In acquiring these lands and rights the bishops appear to have displaced the leading secular lords of Strathclyde from the heart of the valley to

⁴⁷David Parks, 'Late polychromy from Glasgow Cathedral', *Proceedings of the British Archaeological Association Conference in Glasgow*, ed. Richard Fawcett (in press). A full report on the paintings by David Parks including a scientific report on the paints by Helen Howard will be included in the final report.

⁴⁸See article by John Durkan, below.

the Lennox. In considering the significance of Glasgow cathedral we should remember that these buildings were not simply devotional; they also provided a magnificent setting appropriate for a new type of clerical lord.

Questions of cultural influence and political independence are particularly important to bear in mind as we attempt to interpret the ecclesiastical history of Govan and Glasgow. In particular we need to consider how independent of Alba Strathclyde was in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The most influential recent accounts treat the events of the tenth century as a story of the westward expansion of Alba and its domination of Strathclyde. Smyth, for instance, traces this process from the replacement of the Strathclyde royal dynasty by members of the 'house of Kenneth' in the 820s, through a period of constant alliance between the two kingdoms as they dealt with their belligerent neighbours from Viking York and Wessex, to a final annexation. Smyth considers that Edmund of Wessex's grant of Cumbria to Alba in 945 included Strathclyde and thus effectively marked the end of any sense of Strathclyde independence.⁴⁹ This subordinate position is said to be reflected in the practice of designating the ruler of Cumbria as tanist to the king of Scots, with David himself serving as the prime example. Much of the valuable work done by Macquarrie on the source materials for Glasgow, Govan and Strathclyde adopts this position and presumes that from the early tenth century the region was culturally and politically under Gaelic influence.⁵⁰ There is room for doubt here, as David Sellar has stressed.⁵¹ The necessary documentary sources do not exist to confirm that Strathclyde was indeed the subordinate partner. There are no North British chronicles for the period and little genealogical material. Certainly we should be suspicious of allegedly permanent relationships in a world where alliances were remade overnight. Above all, the archaeological evidence suggests that Govan sustained a prosperous religious and political centre of the sort which one would associate with an independent kingdom.

There can be no doubt that, by the time David was made ruler of Cumbria, the kingdom of Strathclyde had been finally subsumed into the kingdom of the Scots. But it looks as though the process of annexation, in the sense of establishing an administrative authority, had scarcely begun. Indeed the key stage in the process of extending the authority of the Scottish kings into Strathclyde appears to have been the establishment of a bishopric in Glasgow in 1114x18.⁵² At the time

⁴⁹Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, 205.

⁵⁰See above, 105.

⁵¹Sellar, 'Warlords, holy men and matrilineal succession', 34-5.

⁵²See nn. 2 and 3, above.

David ruled Strathclyde/Cumbria, so it may be presumed that he was well aware of the political and ideological conditions in the region. The establishment of a new cathedral and the promotion of St Kentigern need to be seen in the context of the effective extension of Scottish power into areas where Scottish rule was weak.

Govan may have been one of the places that stood as an obstacle to the development of Scottish rule in Strathclyde. At the time of the foundation of Glasgow, Govan was an important ecclesiastical establishment with a documented history extending back into the eighth century. Andrew Breeze has recently unearthed a reference to Govan in an account of a joint Pictish-Northumbrian campaign against the Strathclyde British in 756. Having subdued Dumbarton, it is noted in the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham that king Edbert and the Northumbrian army stopped at *Ouania* (which Breeze identifies as Govan) en route south.⁵³ This early reference predates the claims for importance based upon the archaeological evidence. Govan's significance can also be judged from the size of its parish, which may be compared to that of an Anglo-Saxon minster. The church appears to have been directly linked to the Doomster Hill, by a road comparable to the processional way between the Tynwald and St John's Church on Man. The legal and ceremonial activities which were undertaken on the south bank of the Clyde were complimented by other, perhaps fiscal, administrative activities dealt with at Partick. As a collection, these features point to the presence of Strathclyde royal authority and none particularly suggest that a Gaelic cultural agenda was being followed.

In fact, quite the reverse can be argued. A consistent feature of the archaeological evidence, from the style of the sculpture to the shape of the court hill, is Norse influence. Norse aspects are so abundant that we must at least entertain the notion that from the late ninth century there was a significant Norse component in the rulership of the kingdom of Strathclyde. The most plausible context for this influence and for the emergence of Govan in the late ninth century is provided by the events of 870. In that year the emblematic centre of the kingdom, Dumbarton, was destroyed by Vikings after a four-month siege and its people (and English and Picts besides) carried off to Dublin.⁵⁴ Given the coherence of the structures seen at Govan we are bound to wonder whether Govan was a planned replacement for Dumbarton and whether we are entitled to read the Norse features there as evidence that the post-ninth-century kingdom sought to redefine itself in Norse terms.

⁵³ A. Breeze, 'Simeon of Durham's annal for 756 and Govan, Scotland', *Nomina* (forthcoming); *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, vol. ii, *Historia Regum*, ed. Thos. Arnold (London 1885), 40-1.

⁵⁴ AU 870.6, 871.2: *The Annals of Ulster (to A. D. 1131)*, Part I: Text and Translation, edd. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin 1983).

Certainly Strathclyde of the late ninth and early tenth centuries was alive with Vikings from Dublin and York, but then so was Alba. Custantin mac Aeda, who dominated northern affairs for the first half of the tenth century, married his daughter into the Dublin Viking dynasty and had descendants with Norse names.⁵⁵ Given that context it would be hardly surprising to see a hybrid Norse and Celtic aristocracy ruling in Strathclyde as elsewhere around the Irish Sea.

Of course the shift from Govan to Glasgow cannot be read simply in political terms; there were also ecclesiastical dimensions to the move. These concerns may be considered in the context of the early medieval evolution of the Church as an institution. Alexander Murray has proposed a three stage scheme of development which seems to fit the Glasgow/Govan evidence.⁵⁶ Murray postulates an initial missionary phase in which churches were haphazardly founded and had an uncertain longevity. His second phase sees the construction of 'territorial grids', parishes and *paruchia*e, which were not controlled by a central religious authority, but rather were heavily dependant on local patronage. Govan perhaps fits the mould of a 'minster' carved out of the middle Clyde valley with the support of the local lords. As there is no evidence for the nature of the religious community, it is perhaps safest not to assume that it was a monastic foundation. Murray's final stage sees the establishment of orthodox ecclesiastical institutions which are characterised by rigorous observance of the sacraments. In its early decades Glasgow cathedral certainly showed a keen interest in the liturgy and built churches suitable for the performance of complex rites. The celebration of Kentigern in his Life as a great bishop and holy man may reflect this interest in sacramental authority.

The GUARD excavations revealed the relentless development of the cathedral in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It seems clear, however, from these along with other excavations undertaken at the Bishop's Palace and elsewhere in the burgh,⁵⁷ that prior to the twelfth century Glasgow was a place of little consequence. The absence of early medieval sculpture, or any other evidence dating to the ninth to eleventh centuries, suggests that when the diocese was established in the early twelfth century Glasgow possessed a modest church, probably

⁵⁵Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, 210; the names are Custantin's son Illulb (Norse *Hildulfr*), his son Cuilén (called in one place Cuilén *ring*, possibly a Norse epithet, *hring*), and Cuilén's son, Amlaib (*Óláfr*). See, however, Benjamin T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 89, 94, and *idem*, 'The language of the Scottish Chronicle and its European context', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 18 (1998) 57-73, at 66, where attempts are made to find non Norse explanations of these names.

⁵⁶A. Murray, 'Missionaries and magic in Dark Age Europe', *Past and Present* no.136 (1992) 186-205.

⁵⁷See Sylvia J. Stevenson and Elizabeth P. D. Torrie, *Historic Glasgow: the archaeological implications of development*, 2 vols (Scottish Burgh Survey, 1990).

timber-built, serving a small rural population and dedicated to a popular British saint.

The contrast with ninth to eleventh century Govan could not be starker. Govan church was the centre of a prosperous, probably royally-sponsored cult and cemetery, which was one axis of a ceremonial and administrative complex at the heart of Strathclyde. At first glance Govan with its putative royal associations would seem to have been the natural location to house the new diocese of Strathclyde/Cumbria. On reflection, however, it would seem that it was exactly these royal associations which ruled Govan out. In this respect its status and importance were a liability: the kings or kin of kings buried at Govan were those of the annexed kingdom of Strathclyde and devotions focused on the patron saint of the deposed ruling dynasty. Govan was an impossible choice for a cathedral which was to serve the interests of the Scottish kingdom. David may not have intended that Govan languish—many great European cities of his day would have possessed more than one major church—but in the event Govan was marginalised.

The cathedral thus stands as the physical manifestation of devotion to St Kentigern, to the power of the bishops, and of the success enjoyed by the kings of Scots in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Judging from the archaeological evidence at Govan, we would be wrong to imagine that Strathclyde was the lapdog of the king of Scots. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the cathedral is a monument to the Scottish nation, while Govan is a reminder of the regional kingdoms from which it was fashioned.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸This paper is published with the aid of a grant from Historic Scotland which the editor and publishers of the *Innes Review* gratefully acknowledge.